

Early History of Astoria's Economy, Community Organization and Cultural Development.

Mr. W.H. Gray writes in his History of Oregon, "In all countries it is difficult to trace the history of their early discovery and settlement. Oregon is no exception."

No evidence can be found in national archives, or among the native tribes of the country that gives the discovery of the Columbia River to any civilized people but to the Bostons. So that as far as our civil history or national testimony is concerned we are without any, except the conjectures of men as ignorant as ourselves.

A ship owned by Messrs. Barrell, Bullfinch & Co. of Boston, and commanded by Capt. Robert Gray, discovered and entered the mouth of the third great river upon the American continent. It then had no name known to the civilized world. This unselfish American, instead of following the example of many contemporary British navigators by giving his own name to the majestic river he had discovered, gave it that of his noble ship Columbia.

In going back one hundred years and more to establish our beginnings of community organization in and around Astoria, we have to include Clatsop Plains, as many of our earliest native settlers, the Indians, were well established on Clatsop Plains before the beginning of Astoria in 1811. Practically all early travel and communications in this Clatsop territory were dependent on water, hence the development of river navigation played an important part in the lives of the early settlers. Road construction was a great concern of the early pioneer. Even as late as 1855 there was no road between Clatsop Plains and Astoria, everybody using boats or canoes, and some fortunate enough to own horses used them for travel.

As settlers drifted into the Clatsop Area, communities grew up in widely separated sections. In Dr. Owens-Adair book of this region, "Gleanings of a Pioneer Woman" she says her Father and Mother crossed the plains with the first immigrant wagons of 1843 and settled on Clatsop Plains with fifty cents in his pocket.

Dr. Mc.Loughlin, manager at Ft. Vancouver, loaned potatoes and wheat to Thos. Owens, and he would replace these supplies from his first harvest. In the winter of 1844 Thos. Owens put in most of his time making rails for Rev. J.L. Parrish in exchange for provisions for his family. In the Spring of 1845 Thos. Owens sowed six acres of wheat and one acre of potatoes. The early pioneers used their faithful coffee grinders which they brought overland in their belongings to grind the wheat for flour. There were no shoes and stockings for anybody. Mrs. Thos. Owens made moccasins from

speech  
This Thos. Owens is the great-grandfather of Dick Fulton, Astoria Attorney.  
Feb. 1st. 1955 - May Miller



deer skins obtained from the Indians. In the Spring of 1845 Thos. Owens raised the first flax in this Clatsop Area. From this crop Mrs. Owens obtained enough floss to pad two quilts, and a large hank of flax fibre which she spun into thread, which was used in making the first pair of shoes she wore on Clatsop. Mrs. Owens spinning wheel was made by David Ingalls, who had never seen a flax wheel, but made it from Mrs. Owens discription. The shoes, made of Elk's skin, prepared by Thos. Owens were made by Samuel Hall, who also made the last to fit the shoes on. The Indians were crazy to get this flax fibre for making their fish nets, as it was greatly superior to the twine they made from cedar bark. Mrs. Owens sold all the flax she could raise at from 50 to 60 cents per pound. This crop of flax she exchanged for from ten to fifteen barrels of fine Chinook Salmon worth nine to ten dollars per barrel.

After 1845 wild cranberries brought from ten to twelve dollars a barrel in San Francisco, and for several years she gathered from ten to twelve barrels each year for market.

In 1846 or 1847 Thos. Owens procured a herd of Spanish cattle from Robert Shortess, American Fur trader, about sixty or sixty five head. From these Owens was to get one third of the calves, and give Robert Shortess ten pounds of butter per year from every cow they milked. A woman had never milked one of these vicious animals until Mrs. Owens tried it while her husband stood by with a club. Up to this time Mr. Owens had never milked a cow, but he sooned learned. They broke and milked ten cows the first year and sold butter from fifty cents to one dollar and fifty cents per pound. From then on they made money quickly for their ever increasing family.

In the Fall of 1845 Messrs. Owens, Trask, Perry, Marlin and Tibbits built the first grist mill in Clatsop County on the Ohanna Creek. Thos. Owens was the first Sheriff of Clatsop County, being sworn into office to settle some difficulties with the Indians.

Foremost among cultural development and community organization are the churches and schools, which played a great part in the early settlement and organization of all the towns of early Oregon. The Clatsop Plains Pioneer Presbyterian church was established Sept. 19th. 1846 at the home of William H. Gray. Rev. Lewis Thompson served as pastor, and the congregation met at homes until 1850, at which time a church building was constructed in Astoria on what is now 9th. st. between Duane and Exchange streets. The original "minutes" book of Clatsop Plains Presbyterian church is being taken care of by Mr. Emil Nymen of Astoria, for many years an officer in the Presbyterian Church at Astoria.



(3) In May of 1840 Rev. J.H. Frost arrived in Astoria, being sent out by the Methodist Missionary to establish a home here. Rev. Frost was met by Solomon Smith, they became warm friends, and started at once to bring their little community into shape. All buildings had been completed by the Fall of 1840. Solomon Smith played an important role in the early development of the Clatsop Plains community. He brought the first horses to this region in 1841. Solomon Smith and Rev. Frost drove a herd of cattle from the Willamette Valley overland through the Tillamook region to Clatsop Plains. Solomon Smith opened a store on the Skipanon River a few years later, and in 1851 established the Harold Lumber Mill on the Lewis & Clark River. Solomon Smith married Princess Celiast, one of three daughters of Chief Cobayway, wealthy Indian chief of this Clatsop Area. Seven children were born to this union. One son, Silas Smith, who died in 1902 wrote a paper for the Oregon Historical Society on early Indian History and Folk lore of this region. This data is to be found among the valuable historical works at our Library.

Meanwhile news of the settlement of Clatsop Plains had spread throughout the Willamette Valley and in the Fall of 1843 additional settlers began to arrive. Henry H. Hunt was among them and in 1843 commenced the erection of a saw mill at Cathlamet Head. This mill, the first, in what was later to become Clatsop County was equipped with wheels and cogs made of oak and crab apple wood. Lumber turned out by this mill sold for \$10.00 per thousand feet, most of it being shipped to California and the Sandwich Islands.

The early settlers of the Clatsop Region occupied themselves with dairying, stock raising and farming.

In 1854 Astoria was composed of five town sites, John Mc.Clure's Astoria, John Adair's claim, Ft. Clatsop, Ft. George and lower Astoria. John Mc.Clure gave two acres of land as a permanent site for the County buildings, which is the present site of the buildings today. In 1843 John M. Shively settled on a claim in what is now the heart of the City of Astoria. John Shively, Col. John Mc.Clure and A.E. Wilson with James Bernie in charge of the Hudson Bay Co. were the only white residents of Astoria in 1844.

Robert Shortess, Samuel Smith, James Weloh and David Ingalls arrived during 1845 and 1846 taking up land claims which was later to become Astoria.

On June 3rd, 1845 a meeting was called at the home of Samuel Smith for the election of officers for the provincial Government and Clatsop District. In this election 124 voters took part. The Oregon Territory was created by an act of Congress in 1848. Oregon became a state Febr. 14th, 1859.



(4)  
On Aug. 9th. 1845 the Provincial Legislature passed a bill establishing in each district Courts having jurisdiction in probate matters and County business.

The district judges for Clatsop District chosen by the legislature was Robert Shortess, Calvin and W.T. Perry. The district judges had the jurisdiction of justices of the peace and the power of county commissioners. Early meetings of these officials were held in their homes. During the years of 1852 to 1854 court was held in the homes of C.J. Trenchard, S.T. Mc. Kean and Conrad Boelling, early settlers of Astoria.

Annual rent for transaction of County business cost \$7.00. Cost of summoning a Grand Jury was \$3.00, and \$3.00 was also paid Sheriff's attendance at Court. The County Clerk received \$12.00. The Judges \$30.00. Bills of the road commissioners amounted to \$12.00. The cost of County government in Clatsop County for the year 1848 totaled \$67.75.

In Sept. 1854 bids were called for building a Court House. David Ingalls was building supervisor, it was completed in 1855 and was accepted by the County Commissioners.

In 1847 the first U.S. post office west of the Rocky Mts. was opened at Astoria with John M. Shively in charge. It was located on what is now 15th. st. just across the street from the present site of St. Mary Hospital.

In 1848, an act of Congress established the first U.S. Customs House on the Pacific Coast at Astoria, Oregon and Col. John Adair became the first Collector of Customs at the new post.

W.W. Parker came to Astoria in 1852, was active in establishing the first school in Astoria, which was located on what is now corner of 9th. & Exchange streets, part of the original building is still in use. *Lepple Plumb Shop* Mrs. Celeste Gearhart who recently passed away at the age of 108 was one of the early school teachers. They started school with ten pupils and school was held June, July, August and September.

Mr. W.W. Parker served as Postmaster, Mayor, Deputy Collector of Customs, helped to build and support a church and also helped to organize the first temperance society in Clatsop County.

The first railroad completed for public service was built between Young's Bay and Seaside in 1890. This railroad known as the Astoria and South Coast railroad was equipped with a wood burning engine and flatcars for the conveyance of passengers and freight. The line because of legal property entanglements was not completed to Astoria until 1893. The present railroad between Portland and Astoria was built in 1898. The early years of railroad operation between Astoria and Portland saw intense competition between the railway and



the river boat lines. A war between the river boats and trains to Portland brought the fare down to 25¢ on the train to Portland. This would have been a disastrous condition for the merchants of Astoria if it had been continued very long. A round trip to Portland on a train in those early days showed how intense was the rivalry of the wealthy steamboat and railroad barons.

Clatsop County was created in 1844, before that it was known as Clatsop District.

The County Court is composed of County Judge and two commissioners, and is responsible for the maintenance of roads, provides all county buildings, allots funds for payments of all county expenses. Until the enactment during recent years of important public welfare legislation, the County Court was the only county agent invested with the care of indigents. The County Court appoints the following county officials, County Engineer, Veterinarian, the dairy herd inspector, county agricultural agent, three members of the County Fair Board, members of the dog control board and judges and clerks for election precincts.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. completed a telegraph line to Astoria in 1876.

The first telephone in the County was started in Astoria in Sept. 1877.

The first telephone exchange was established in Astoria on April 1st. 1884.

*Mrs. Henrietta Prael remembers Mr. Kippen - well.*  
The First Mayor of Astoria was Wm. F. Kippen, took office August 1873.

It is hard for Astorians in this ultra modern age to look back 140 years and think of the hardships and privations that beset the early pioneers in their efforts to make a home in this great Western wilderness. Many times the pioneer men would be gone 20 to 30 days on an overland trip to Willamette Valley or Hudson Bay Co. Vancouver, Wash. for medical supplies or provisions, leaving the women in charge of their families and all their belongings to combat whatever might arise, be it the elements, Indians or wild animals. Never enough praise can be given the early pioneer women who stood besides their mates with courage and fortitude to help in every way they could.